

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

1. Please provide information on the treatment of family members of underground Christians.

RESPONSE

1. Please provide information on the treatment of family members of underground Christians.

According to the US Department of State's *2008 Human Rights Report: China*, family members of unregistered religious figures "were targeted for arbitrary arrest, detention, and harassment" during 2008:

During the year human rights activists, journalists, unregistered religious figures, and former political prisoners and their family members were among those targeted for arbitrary detention or arrest.

The government continued to use house arrest as a nonjudicial punishment and control measure against dissidents, former political prisoners, family members of political prisoners, petitioners, underground religious figures, and others it deemed politically sensitive. House arrest encompassed varying degrees of stringency but sometimes included complete isolation in one's own home or another location under lock and guard. In some cases house arrest involved constant monitoring, but the target of house arrest was occasionally permitted to leave the home to work or run errands. Sometimes those under house arrest were required to ride in the vehicles of their police monitors when venturing outside. When outside the home, the subject of house arrest was usually, but not always, under surveillance. In some instances security officials assumed invasive positions within the family home, rather than monitoring from the outside.

...Family members of activists and rights defenders, Falun Gong practitioners, journalists, unregistered religious figures, and former political prisoners were targeted for arbitrary arrest, detention, and harassment. Some were required to leave Beijing during the Olympics. Rights activist Zeng Jinyan, the wife of Hu Jia, reportedly was held at a hotel in Dalian during the Olympics. After returning Zeng Jinyan to her Beijing apartment, authorities kept her under close surveillance. Yuan Weijing, the wife of legal advisor Chen Guangcheng, continued to be subjected to ongoing harassment, including strict surveillance, confinement to her home, and denial of prison visits (US Department of State 2009, *2008 Human Rights Report: China*, 25 February, Section 1d & 1f – Attachment 1).

According to the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report 2008*, "Prominent house church leaders and their family members continued to serve time in prison." According to the US Department of State, "In some locations, local authorities reportedly forced unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce ordinations approved by the Holy See, join the official church, or face a variety of punishments including fines, job loss, detentions, and having their children barred from school" (US Department of State 2008, *2008 International Religious Freedom Report 2008 – China*, 19 September, Section II 'Abuses of Religious Freedom' – Attachment 2).

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response dated 26 June 2008 provides information on the treatment of children of members of underground Christian churches in China (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, *CHN102868 – China: Treatment of children of members of underground Christian churches; whether children of members of underground Christian churches are subject to sanctions, including reduced access to education and to health care*, 26 June – Attachment 3).

[China Aid Association](#) is "a nonprofit Christian organization seeking to uncover and reveal the truth about religious persecution in China, focusing especially on the unofficial church." China Aid Association provides the following information on the families of imprisoned Christians in China:

Many imprisoned Christians leave behind families. Spouses and children of prisoners are often abandoned by other family members, even persecuted by their community. They may lose jobs and be unable to support themselves. Sometimes, both husband and wife are incarcerated. Often, the prisoner's house church is too poor to help financially ('Families of the Persecuted' (undated), China Aid Association website <http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=52> – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 4).

A number of recent examples of the treatment of family members of underground Christians in China were found amongst the sources consulted.

An article dated 1 July 2009 by the China Aid Association reports that Pastor Dou Shaowen and his wife Feng Lu were sentenced to one year of re-education through labor for "engaging in illegal religious activities." On 25 June 2009, Feng Lu was released by officials to serve her sentence at home so she can care for their daughter:

While Pastor Dou Shaowen is imprisoned at the labor camp, officials released Feng Lu on the evening of June 25. Authorities have permitted Feng Lu to serve her sentence at home, in order to care for their 12-year-old daughter. She is required to report to the Public Security Bureau regularly, and could be sent to labor camp again if she is found "engaging in illegal religious activities" again ('Rock Church Pastor and Wife Sentenced to One Year of Labor Camp in Henan' 2009, China Aid Association website, 1

July http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105& function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1235&month=07&year=2009& nc=550bc70e671d55a250dc50e7a3ef1621 – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 5).

US Senator Dorgan made a speech in the US Senate on 23 April 2009 about Gao Zhisheng, a dissident lawyer who recently disappeared in China. Dorgan reports that Gao Zhisheng is a devout Christian who represented “persecuted Christians” and “fought to protect those who engage in peaceful spiritual and religious practice in China.” The treatment of Gao Zhisheng’s family led them to leave China:

And in 2005, they took away his license to practice law, closed his law practice. As I said, in 2007, they arrested him, threw him in prison and tortured him. Eventually he was released and brought back home and placed under police surveillance at home. The surveillance proved almost harsher than prison. In fact, a member of the communist police moved into their living room, prevented his daughter from going to school; his 16-year-old daughter barred from attending schools. 24-hour surveillance.

The treatment for that family in recent months was so brutal that they decided their survival depended on escaping China. But Gao was too closely monitored and could not think of leaving them without placing his family at great, great risk.

And so in January, Gao’s wife, six-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter were smuggled out of China. They then traveled to the United States. And after his family fled China 80 days ago, ten security agents took Gao from his bed and he hasn’t been seen or heard from since (‘Senator Dorgan’s Speech on the Floor of the United States Senate, April 23, 2009’, China Aid Association website, 23

April http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=135& function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1184 – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 6).

An article dated 16 March 2009 by *National Public Radio* also reports on Gao Zhisheng’s family who were granted refugee status in the US. According to Jerome Cohen, a Chinese law expert at New York University, “Now, as a matter of practice, not as a matter of law, the Chinese government seems to be bringing back collective punishment, often punishing not just the alleged offender, but also their entire family — children as well as spouses,” he says.” The article continues:

The authorities had forbidden the family from applying for passports. So, the family managed to sneak away from those watching them and travel to the southern province of Yunnan, where she paid human smugglers, known as snakeheads, nearly \$6,000 to smuggle her family over the border. Then there was an exhausting eight-day journey that ended in Thailand.

“We traveled by night,” she says. “Friends took us, and we didn’t really talk. Sometimes we were traveling by motorbike, and we had to get off to walk across mountain passes. We were scared, and it was hard, but we had to keep going forward.”

The family was helped by a network of people, many of whom took enormous personal risks. The U.S.-based Christian nongovernmental organization China Aid helped the family coordinate with U.S. agencies.

Founder Bob Fu says the journey was extremely dangerous.

“At one time, they had to be separated, and the 5-year-old boy was captured by the local government guards of a third country,” he says. “The mother was not aware, the sister was not aware. The group assigned to that boy was able to ... persuade the guards to release the boy.”

...Geng says the family could no longer live under constant surveillance. Her husband had been convicted of inciting subversion in 2006, but was released from prison. She says their children had been deeply traumatized, especially their 15-year-old daughter, Geng Ge.

“Our daughter was not allowed to go to school,” she says. “Her mood was unstable. She tried to commit suicide and talked about it. She cut her arms with a knife and slashed an artery. It bled a lot. She still has scars today.”

There is a chilling recording of her daughter phoning another Chinese dissident Hu Jia in desperation.

“I really want to go to the U.S. Embassy,” she says, “But I know I can’t.”

She complains of harassment by plainclothes policewomen and, her voice quavering, she tells of how they insult her father.

...Jerome Cohen, a Chinese law expert at New York University, says Gao Zhisheng’s case shows a new, disturbing trend of “prison at home.”

“Now, as a matter of practice, not as a matter of law, the Chinese government seems to be bringing back collective punishment, often punishing not just the alleged offender, but also their entire family — children as well as spouses,” he says (Lim, Louisa 2009, ‘Family Of Chinese Activist Lawyer Escapes To U.S.’, *National Public Radio*, 16

March <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101865588> – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 7).

An article dated 12 June 2009 by the China Aid Association reports that “Gao Zhisheng’s family suffered under house arrest before their escape to the U.S.” The article continues:

In a briefing in Beijing in March, Qing Gang, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, said, “There’s no political persecution or limits on the freedom of the [Gao] family. We’ve handled the case in strict accordance with the law.” This statement denies the two years Gao Zhisheng’s family suffered under house arrest before their escape to the U.S. this past March. “House arrest” meant that the family was cut off from the outside world and multiple officers were assigned to each family member 24 hours a day. Gao’s son, Gao Tianyu, was assigned three officers, the least number of officers. Gao’s daughter, Gege, 16, was beaten by officers and the entire family endured harassment and abuse (‘Chinese Embassy Responds Regarding Kidnapping Christian Attorney Gao Zhisheng’ 2009, China Aid Association website, 12 June http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1216 – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 8).

An article dated 6 March 2009 by the China Aid Association reports that house church leader, Pastor Lou Yuanqi of Uygur Autonomous Region remains in prison despite receiving a verdict of insufficient evidence on charges of “utilizing superstition to undermine the law.” After the trial, the Pastor’s daughter was beaten by court police when she tried to speak to her father:

After Lou’s trial, his daughter Lou Tiantian, 18, was beaten by court police when she tried to speak with her father as he was being put into a police car. Lou Tiantian was taken to the hospital where she received medical treatment, then was released the same night (‘Insufficient

Evidence for Pastor Lou Yuanqi's Case, Yet Authorities Continue to Keep Him in Prison' 2009, China Aid Association website, 6

March http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1155&nc=1a0b382de6d125a0e1a9b724829cced8 – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 9).

An article dated 12 July 2008 in *The Christian Post* by Dr. Carl Moeller, President of [Open Doors USA](#), “an international non-profit ministry which supports and strengthens persecuted Christians” provides information on Shi Weihai. Moeller reports that Shi Weihai is detained in a Chinese prison after being arrested on 19 March 2008 for publishing Bibles and Christian literature. Moeller reports that his family are under Public Security Bureau (PSB) surveillance:

A father of two, Shi has been held without any family visits. His wife, Zhang Jing, has received no word on her husband's condition, and she has been prohibited from bringing him any food or clothing since his re-arrest. Until the end of April, Shi had also been denied a visit from his attorney.

Adding to his family's stress is the intimidation they are experiencing from being under surveillance by the Public Security Bureau. They are followed wherever they go, even when Zhang sends her daughters to school. The movements of Shi's lawyer are also being monitored to ensure that he will not make contact with any foreigner or groups overseas. The PSB tell him, though, that they are only doing that in order to “protect him” so that his work will not be interrupted (Moeller, Dr. Carl 2008, ‘Despite Some Improvements, China Still Persecuting Believers in Wake of Olympics’, *The Christian Post*, 12 July <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20080712/despite-some-improvements-china-still-persecuting-believers-in-wake-of-olympics/index.html>; and <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20080712/despite-some-improvements-china-still-persecuting-believers-in-wake-of-olympics/page2.html> – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 10).

An article dated 22 June 2008 by *Frontline/WORLD*, a news program of the *Public Broadcasting Service* (PBS) reports on the treatment of underground Christian Zhang Mingxuan and his family:

Zhang and his family move frequently from apartment to apartment on the fringes of Beijing because, they believe, landlords are pressured by police to evict them. Lawyers familiar with his case say police have warned them to rein him in, but he continues to organize churches and preach the need for uniting to demand greater rights.

“I am an honest citizen. Everything I do is legal,” Zhang said. “But in the eyes of the Communist Party, everybody in my family--me, my wife, my two sons and daughter-in-law--we are dangerous people. Our phone is bugged. We are followed everywhere. Wherever we stay, we are thrown out” (Osnos, Evan 2008, ‘Life on the Edge’, *Frontline/WORLD*, 22 June http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/china_705/history/excerpt – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 11).

An article dated 24 November 2008 by the China Aid Association reports on Pastor “Bike” Zhang Mingxuan who “has been accused by officials of engaging in “illegal business operations” for distributing free silicon prayer bands.” Bike was held between 16 and 27 October 2008 by authorities:

During this time, his family was evicted from their homes, his sons were beaten, and his wife and her sister were also placed under arrest. After international outcry, authorities released

Pastor Bike, his wife and her sister on October 27 ('Pastor "Bike" Zhang Accused of Illegal Business Operations for Giving Away Prayer Bands' 2008, China Aid Association website, 24

November http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=355&_nc=c063f8248d5f847993ff402fb197abdf – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 12).

According to an article dated 16 January 2009 by China Aid Association, "Authorities refuse to allow Pastor Bike and his family to stay in Beijing." The article continues:

This morning, evening in China, more than a dozen Public Security Bureau (PSB) officers forcibly escorted Pastor "Bike" Zhang Mingxuan from Pastor Hua Huiqi's home in Beijing and put him on a bus to Henan province. Authorities refuse to allow Pastor Bike and his family to stay in Beijing.

This is the most recent in a series of actions against Pastor Bike by government authorities. Pastor Bike called ChinaAid from the bus. He said he went Pastor Hua's home to visit Pastor Hua's father, Hua Zaichen, 91 who is dying. Hua Zaichen's wife, Shuang Shuying, 79, is in prison and authorities refuse to allow her to see her husband. Pastor Bike was praying for Hua Zaichen when the government officials broke into the house ('More Than a Dozen PSB Officers Force Pastor Bike Out of Beijing' 2009, China Aid Association website, 16 January http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1127 – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 13).

An article dated 12 October 2007 in *The South China Morning Post* and posted on the SinOptic website reports on the hospitalisation of Christian activist Hua Huiqi. *The South China Morning Post* reports that "the family was being watched by police." The article continues:

Dozens of police from rival city districts in Beijing fought a pitched battle yesterday over Christian activist Hua Huiqi, who was knocked unconscious during the melee and admitted to hospital. ...Mr Hua, under scrutiny by the authorities due to his long history of underground church activism, also has a history of opposing home evictions in the capital. He has been detained repeatedly in recent years for leading a house church, as well as for his rights defence efforts on other issues. Recently, Mr Hua began helping petitioners from the provinces who travel to Beijing seeking justice. He was released from jail in July after serving six months for "obstructing justice". Under heavy police guard, Mr Hua moved out of his Chongwen district home on Monday and was taken to Fengtai district, in the southwest of the city. But Fengtai police did not want him in their jurisdiction, and yesterday he returned to Chongwen with a dozen Fengtai policemen. He was greeted by Chongwen policemen and the developer's security guards, according to witnesses. Both those groups were equally intent on not letting him return to his home, which is slated for demolition. Late yesterday Mr Hua was still in hospital. Family members said doctors were refusing to discuss his condition, and the family was being watched by police ('Activist beaten as rival police clash in melee – Campaigner knocked unconscious' 2007, *South China Morning Post*, 12 October, SinOptic website <http://www.sinoptic.ch/embassy/presseschau/2007/20071006-1012.htm> – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 14).

An article dated 28 July 2008 by the China Aid Association provides the following information on an attack on Beijing house church leader, Hua Huiqi and his family:

Brother Hua Huiqi lives in his house in Dushi Garden in Chongwen District of Beijing. As authorities everywhere use the excuse of security defense, they threaten Hua Huiqi that he must cooperate with the government and provide the addresses and list of names of house

churches and report to them the house churches that have stopped meeting.

...The incident occurred at 8:30 on the evening of July 2 when Yang Jian, a member of the Homeland Security Defense Brigade of Chongwen Public Security Bureau, led a group of policemen and plain-clothed officers to 633, Unit 6, 6th Floor of Dushi Garden and conducted intense personal attacks on Brother Hua Huiqi. They harassed and verbally abused him and smashed open the door of Hua Huiqi's house with a huge iron ax weighing a dozen of pounds. Using brutal force, they drove the whole family of Hua Huiqi to the courtyard of Dushi Garden. Among the people driven to the courtyard were his 90-year-old father and his frail brother. While they drove Hua's folks to the courtyard, Hua Huilin, Hua's brother, was injured in one of his eyes. We have the rental agreement on the house we live in ('Beijing's Authorities Force House Church Leaders to Sign Covenant to Shut Down Church Services Durin' 2008, China Aid Association website, 28

July http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1000 – Accessed 2 July 2009 – Attachment 15).

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US Congressional-Executive Commission on China <http://www.cecc.gov/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

United Nations (UN)

UNHCR Refworld <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd>

Non-Government Organisations

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

International News & Politics

BBC News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

The Christian Post <http://www.christianpost.com/>

Frontline/WORLD <http://www.pbs.org/>

Topic Specific Links

China Aid Association <http://www.chinaaid.org/>

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REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

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